

## Theory

### Structuralism

1) a movement, method, first developed in anthropology and then transferred to the other human sciences which draws on structural linguistics (the work of Saussure).

Best known proponent, Claude Lévi-Strauss. Essentially developed to study "static" cultures (therefore questionable how it can be applied to changing ones).

2) it relies on an analysis of relationships which are seen as significant patterns. (often patterns of binary opposition and substitution.) These are found through looking for patterns of repetition and difference. [explain, 19th c. discovery of classification by difference, not similarity]

example: oedipal conflict narrative. (**a narrative structure**)

basic structure: father and son in conflict over woman (3 term relationship)

woman has volition, can help one or other

father has initial power [NB these terms are symbolic]

must be displaced. a power struggle, but framed within

gender and sexuality.

Basic Western Love Myth: Tristan and Isolde (tragic version)

Comic oedipal version. [see my analysis of Shampoo]

The basic question: once we see the repetition of the basic pattern over time and so many different examples in different times and places, we have to acknowledge that it is significant. Why is it there?

Structuralism was useful in cultural analysis because it went beyond, provided a position for critiqueing:

#### Empiricism and positivism

**empiricism:** the world can be adequately known through examination of its tangible phenomenae

**positivism:** the tools and methods of investigating the hard sciences are applicable to social phenomenae; anti-historical

**Historicism;** that history tells its own truth which is revealed in the evidence (as against contemporary notion that history is a constructed discourse about the past)

Rhetorical, Aristotelean analysis (another ahistorical analysis; mechanistic, of fixed categories (eg, tragedy)

Organic analysis: unity of form and content, very powerful when combined with historical analysis; but, has limits in cultural analysis when it does not offer a way of looking at systematic absence (esp. oppression), can be used to simply accept what already is, rather than look for potential for change.

[NB structuralism has this same problem]

Structural analysis is also very compatible with Formalism, esp. as developed by Russian Formalists. Esp. in close analysis of formal features.

The appeal of structuralism. It tries to develop models which could then be used to analyze a relationship--it lends itself well to **comparative** analysis. In terms of film, it applies well to the patterns of repetition that were being developed in authorship criticism.

It also fits well with ideas of narrative, esp. well in terms of formulaic fictions, eg. mainstream H'wood film.

It has been frequently used as an approach which combines genre and social analysis (eg Will Wright's Sixguns and Society; which see the critique of by Janey Place in JC); the problem with it is that it often remains static, and that it often refuses history.

Opens up the possibility of a **symptomatic** reading: something which is found to be significant in cultural objects being investigated, can itself be taken as evidence of a more profound pattern within the culture as a whole. (eg absence or marginalization of certain groups is itself revealing--Blacks appear only as servants, and only for a brief moment; women insignificant in (most examples of) war, gangster, western, male action film--there only to mark something about the hero, or to be raped or murdered to further the plot. NB. not in all cases, we are talking about dominant patterns, not absolute rules.

The dissatisfaction that most people feel with a pure structuralism (and why it hardly exists as such, at least in film studies) is that it seems finally, to assign agency (why things happen, how they might change) to the structure. (In this it is much like Jungian criticism, archetypal analysis.) In this sense its ideas tend to be taken over for diagnostic or symptomatic purposes rather than ends in themselves.

Some examples, developing structuralism in a Marxist/feminist criticism:

Charles Eckert, "Anatomy of a Proletarian Film: Warner's **Marked Woman**" in Nichols M&M2

Charles Eckert, "Shirley Temple and the House of Rockefeller" in Peter Steven, ed., Jump Cut: HP&CC.

Chuck Kleinhans "SHAMPOO: Oedipal Symmetries and Heterosexual Knots," *Jump Cut* no. 26 (winter 1981-82). pp. 12-18.

Julia Lesage, "**Celine and Julie Go Boating:**" JC 24/25

The Cahiers analysis of **Morocco**

from CdC 225 (Nov-Dec 1970) 5-13

begins with quote from Georges Bataille which takes a dim view of H'wood:

"it seems impossible...to discover anywhere else in the world women so unnatural, gross, impossible." Love, the philosophy of the boudoir, is demeaned.

1. This analysis is a continuation of the **YML** piece  
there CdC demonstrated that the ideological énoncé--what is uttered in itself--is subverted by the stress effects of the Fordian writing.  
[i.e. Ford's style/form changes the ideological content]
2. **YML** is the ethical-political face of the capitalist and theological face of H'wood.  
**Morocco** is its erotic face. H'wood is the major site of the production of the erotic myths of bourgeois society. (erotic is equated with fetishist, w/o explanation)
3. From Kristeva, the change in the 14th c. from epic to novelesque (romance).  
woman is offered up as a "pseudo-center"; not as woman in her social reality but as figure which the man (author/hero) then relates to; she exists so he can act.  
[NB this is an analysis of the text itself, not of the reception of the text; but that will be significantly changed in Mulvey's analysis which also draws on Berger's Ways of Seeing (implicitly, at least) because she will also discuss reception by the viewer-subject] this is also not really a very good analysis of changing nature of narrative placement of women at this time; cannot be sustained as an analysis in other national literatures very well. This section is the foundation for all later Lacanian influenced ideas on the position of women represented in the narrative.
4. NB. "This reciprocal absorption of the One and the Other (the Author and the Woman) within an effacement of sexual difference accounts for (and implies) the fact that the Masquerade, Virile Display and Inversion are the erotic paradigms of **Morocco**." Now, actually, all of this is also based very much on the knowledge of CdC that Sternberg was himself sexually ambiguous (bisexual, or multisexual). In many ways they cannot really accept this and their subsequent discussion (and that of many of the followers of this line of thought) are fundamentally premised on rigid sex/gender differentiation. They do not like ambiguity.
5. From Lacan: "in order to be the phallus (the signifier of the desire of the Other) {that is in order to function within the image/narration as the indicator of the woman's desire}, a woman will reject part of femininity, her attributes in the masquerade." [Is this really perfectly clear? No, not really, they borrow some concepts from Lacan, but it's a kind of imaginative borrowing--it's useful to their purposes, they take it over very casually] See Fn to Montrelay: in order to produce this, a woman takes on masquerade (esp as clothing) to say nothing.
6. In **YML** the diegetic process called for a chronological reading. In **Morocco** the structures are repeated with variation. Thus a synchronic reading is justified.
7. There is a double determination--the erotic and the social.
8. Two love triangles:

La B. loves Amy Jolly who loves Brown  
just as  
Caesar loves Mme. C. who loves Brown

(relationship of Europeans and Moroccans).

9. Erotic relations take place within the framework of a social situation which determines the erotic relations and is determined by them. The social and the erotic form two levels, "inscriptions" in the discourse. The existing social hierarchy is "perverted" by the erotic.

10. Social stratification

- a. the haute bourgeoisie. La B.
- b. the colonial bourgeoisie. La B's friends, the dinner party
- c. the native bourgeoisie
- d. officers of the Legion (Capt. Caesar)
- e. owner of the cabaret
- f. lower strata of Legionnaires, Moroccan crowds, singers, dancers, prostitutes of the cabaret, camp followers.

The men are fixed in position, the women (may have) some fluidity. Mme Caesar dresses "down" as a Moroccan woman. Amy Jolly is fallen in class at the start, is promoted in the film and then chooses to fall again [but for a higher goal, true love, true desire].

The object of desire is of inferior status to the desiring subject. [NB w/in the diegesis]

11. The film shows a "topographical inscription": High/Low in the town and the cabaret; and horizontal between the town and the desert. Desiring subjects find their object in the depths. The desert is the pure signifier of desire.

sets of opposition

Europeans	Moroccans
Old World	New World (Brown)
status	déclassé
grids	uniform white expanse

12. Mythological determinations. The historical role of the star in the Hollywood system. A star has a relatively restricted number of possible types. The extrafilmic and filmic come together in indicating a role. Importance of her first appearance; she has had wealth and erotic success, but this "past capital" has been squandered.

13. Von Sternberg's inscription. First LaB approx. = Sternberg. At first the protector and suitor of Deitrich, then the man who will not be taken over by a woman and who then devalues her. Second, theme of abandonment. Caesar is abandoned by his wife. La B is abandoned by Amy Jolly. La B lowers himself in the whole process [wouldn't this be better understood as masochism?] Note the

transgressive effect--a transgression of the social codes through public admission of distress, defeat, irremedial loss.

14. [The analysis ignores the kiss AJ gives the woman in the cabaret. Is this a show for Brown? Yes, but it can also be taken in other ways; it too is a transgression of the social codes, through public admission of erotic interest in other women.]

15. The relation of femininity to virility is inverted from the phallocentric fantasy. Here Brown is inferior in social position and is AJ's object of desire. The women move from the Old World to the New, to the American. La B is an inverted virility-shows precious behavior. Similarly, Lo Tinto, the cafe owner, is mixed race, shows signs of femininity, gayness.

16. The critique of the **fetishism** of value. In H'wood fetishism moves from commodity to characters, in an erotic fiction.

17. "All values in Morocco are fetishes: money, jewels, clothes, woman (star)." These are extra-cinematic. Sternberg's use of their fetishist nature does not exhaust their value, but accentuates it. "The Sternbergian fetish, therefore, does not inscribe itself into the fiction *solely* as a signifier of castration--it is not solely involved in the trajectories of the erotic (as their cause)." [There is an acknowledgement here that the fetish object does not exist only as erotic, but also as social, in meaning; both are needed; in fact, one potentiates the other.]

18. [But much of the specific argument made here by CdC is based on Lacan's essay "The Signification of the Phallus," which is not a neutral analysis, e.g. the acceptance of the concept of castration as unproblematic. Why Lacan, and what did he say? Lacan introduces a version of Freudian psychoanalysis into French thought which had mostly rejected or resisted psychoanalysis. He makes a number of very significant changes in Freud, particularly in locating the basis of consciousness not in a series of stages of development in childhood, but in the "mirror phase" and the acquisition of language. He takes over concepts of structural linguistics; his work, then, is in many ways complementary with that of Althusser on ideology.]

19. [The key question as it develops in terms of the transfer and development of ideas is how psychoanalysis is used, and its own status. In general, there is a problematic situation here. Freudian thought comes very early to the US, and very late to England and France. There is a rather massive extension, elaboration, and critique of Freudian thought, particularly in its implications for social action in the U.S. The early feminist movement in the US takes a very negative and skeptical view of Freudian analysis and its intellectual model; but the French, and in turn the British, find it very appealing and tend to be uncritical of the whole project. There ensues a very complicated, and often antagonistic use of psychoanalysis in critical discussion, particularly in feminist film thought. The important thing in terms of theoretical development, is the status of these concepts: there is often an extreme sliding between different levels of thought. The "scientificness" of psychoanalysis is invoked to declare its truth, but there is

also a frequent use of it in a merely symbolic and approximate way, and a "hiding" of the more problematic aspects of it; this is particularly so with its relation to feminism. Rather than actually rigorously thinking through the conjunction of psychoanalysis, marxism, feminism, and film, and how they can be used together, often there is a sloppy *ad hoc* appropriation and/or a mere citation of authority. This is rather characteristic of film theory in general; often a wholesale taking over of a different system without really examining it carefully.]

20. Deitrich's power of seduction and fascination. In the cabaret, she is elusive and untouchable (except by Brown). She is fetishized in proportion to her inaccessibility. "The moralizing inscription of the renunciation of her accessories is overdetermined by the inscription of them as fetish objects which renew the chain of desire." The film ends up within H'wood--a circular critique of the ideology of natural purity and of fetishism by natural purity. The film ends with the fetish (AJ) chasing the mirage (Brown). [In other words, the film has a critique in it, a certain kind of critique, which is limited. By casting off the cultural signs of eroticism (the jewels, the shoes), AJ seems to be renouncing the artificial for the "natural"; but this is a characteristic move of the dominant ideology, or ideology in general. What is in fact cultural is posed as natural, especially in terms of the down side of a power relationship: women, children, Blacks, etc. are seen as "natural" because they are without power. Sternberg actually cannot present something which is pure and natural as the binary opposition of the artificial, but just ends up with a confused inversion. In other words, Sternberg presents everything within the framework of the artificial and cultural; he then seems to produce a renunciation of that in the pursuit of a pure desire (natural), but cannot really do so.]

21. Brown as mirage. Two times he leaves, but leaves a trace, which motivates AJ to pursue him: the message on the mirror, her name on the table; and finally he leaves for the desert.

indifference, human behaviour is only derisory and vain agitation.

The only certitude, perhaps, is the mountain. Its snowy summit, the only sign of purity. The final hope: the white page for which everything is possible. 'La chair est triste, hélas! et j'ai lu tous les livres.' The ocean breeze rises for the last appeal. 'Les oiseaux sont ivres d'être parmi l'éclume inconnue et les cieux'; the nothingness of Mallarmean alabaster invites Sternberg to the arrogant silence of the disappointed gods. Already his heart no longer hears the song of the seamen belching out their surfeit of heavy beer on the dockside. The artist-Creator is weary.

Certain of the grandeur and the immensity of his work, disheartened by too much incomprehension, Sternberg throws into the face of the world his most perfect creation, perfect because disincarnated and abstract, and he offers to comprehending spirits the creative possibility of a fantasy henceforward without brake or rein. On the empty screen 'que sa blancheur défend' Sternberg finally decides that he will speak no longer. 'The ideal work of art is a blank screen on which each imagination in its turn can paint its own image.'

(translated by Peter Baxter)

## Notes

1. Translator's note: except where otherwise indicated, quotations are from Josef von Sternberg, *Fun in a Gunner Laundry* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1965).
2. Charles Baudelaire, 'Parfum Exotique' in *Flowers of Evil*, trans. Geoffrey Wagner (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1940).

**Morocco**  
(originally published in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No. 225 (November-December 1970), pp. 5-13)

When we consider all this, we can well understand why at the moment Hollywood is the navel of the earth, being the only place where people think of nothing else but amusing the rest of the world, turning out those sow's ears we take for silk purses . . . Hollywood is also the last boudoir where philosophy, become masochistic, can still find that laceration to which, fundamentally, it aspires: as by virtue of an unavoidable illusion it seems impossible, in fact, to discover anywhere else in the world women so unnatural, gross, impossible. The fact is that daily the whole world casts money at their feet so that they won't desert us, just as once it did at the feet of statues of gods or saints. A melancholy way of trusting the heart's salvation to a mirage of tinsel.

Georges Bataille

## I METHOD

1. The present article continues our work on the re-reading of the classic Hollywood cinema which was initiated by our text on John Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln* (No. 223). We saw John Ford's film as exemplary in that it showed an ideological enounced (*énoncé*)<sup>1</sup> subverted by the stress effects of the Fordian writing (*écriture*). *Young Mr Lincoln* represented the ethical-political face of the capitalist and theological field of Hollywood cinema. *Morocco* on the other hand represents its erotic face, as a film that takes its place within the Sternberg oeuvre — an oeuvre produced by Hollywood, for forty years the major site of production of the erotic (fetisist) myths of bourgeois society and as such, itself fetishised and mythologised.
2. In other words, our reading of *Morocco* will distinguish the effects — inscribed with exceptional clarity here, even for Hollywood — implied by its kinship (the modes of which will be examined) with the bourgeois (but equally feudal) fictions produced by Judeo-Christian civilisation, founded on the Law of the Father, and characterised particularly by the role assigned to the woman.

On this point we will cite what Julia Kristeva has written on the historical transition (in the 14th century) from the epic enounced to that

of the novelesque; in other words, the transition from a civilisation of the symbol to a civilisation of the sign (in *Semiotics*, I, IV, 1969: 'Narration et Transformation'). The novelesque model and the system of the sign she describes have, despite the deconstruction to which they have been subjected, continued to be dominant and were especially so in Hollywood in 1930. Kristeva defines the transition in question as marked by the 'justification of one only of the terms of opposition: the Other (the Woman), into which the One<sup>2</sup> (the Author, the Man) projects himself and with which he fuses. An exclusion of the Other is immediately produced which inevitably presents itself as an exclusion of the woman, a non-recognition of sexual and social opposition.'

Woman is a 'pseudo-centre, a mystificatory centre, a blind spot whose value is invested into the One, who gives himself the Other (the centre) in order to live as one, single and unique. From this flows the exclusively positive quality of the blind centre (the Woman) which reaches the infinite (in nobility, and qualities of the heart), effacing disjunction (sexual difference) and dissolving into a series of *images* (from angel to Virgin). . . . the idealisation of the Woman (the Other) signifies a society's refusal to shape itself by acknowledging the *differential* but *non-hierarchical status* of the opposed groups, and equally, that society's structural need to give itself a permutative centre, an *other* entity whose only value is that of *object of exchange* among equals. . . . This devaluating valorisation prepares the ground for, and does not basically distinguish itself from, the explicit devaluation of which woman was the object from the 14th century onwards in bourgeois literature (in mediaeval verse tales, satires and farces). As we know, such devaluation is reasserted quite particularly in Hollywood mythology (e.g. the ingénue, the vamp, the femme fatale). Here the 'pseudo-centre' Kristeva speaks of is the *seifist*, and our text will attempt to distinguish all its occurrences in Sternberg's film (cf. IV.2). This reciprocal absorption of the One and the Other (the Author and the Woman) within an effacement of sexual difference accounts for (and implies) the fact that the Macquerade, Virile Display and Inversion<sup>3</sup> are the erotic paradigms of *Morocco* (cf. Lacan, 'La signification du phallus': 'Paradoxical as this formulation may seem, I am saying that it is in order to be the phallus, that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that a woman will reject an essential part of femininity; namely all her attributes in the masquerade'; and 'The fact that femininity finds its refuge in this mask by virtue of the fact of the repression (*Verdrängung*) inherent in the phallic mark of desire, has the curious consequence of making virile display in the human being itself seem feminine').

2. In *Young Mr Lincoln* the diegetic process (the progressive setting in place of a device functioning as a snare, the substitution of one mode of narration for another in the course of the fiction, the narrative *coup de*

*force* involving a decisive role for the diachronic dimension) called for a reading in terms of its chronological development, since the fictional structures in it were transformed by the narration. In *Morocco*, inversely, as we shall see, the structures of the fiction (cf. section II) are programmed from the outset and are simply repeated with variations in their successive realisations. This justifies us in considering *Morocco* as a text which can be read synchronically, since the key determinations of the fiction can all legitimately be brought together at once within a complete set of their realisations.

#### II STRUCTURE OF THE FICTION

1. To elaborate the structures of a fiction like *Morocco*, we cannot but base ourselves on what constitutes its major enounced: the fictional 'novelesque' situations considered within their double — erotic and social — determination (the La Bessière — Amy Jolly — Brown triangle, and the secondary triangle, Caesar — Mme Caesar — Brown). And in fact, the erotic relations occur within the framework of a rigorously delineated social situation which is not a neutral backdrop, but which, on the contrary, *determines these erotic relations and is in turn determined by them*. In other words: the double erotic/social determination of the fictional situations and the *double inscription* of the discourse of *Morocco*, are such that their reciprocal determining relations are articulated according to a logic (impossible to abstract from the text without relapsing into mechanistic structuralism) which is internal to the scriptural process, and distinguishable in the recurring effects of meaning produced by this double inscription.

2. The *social determinations* of the different characters and the relations these generate between them are organised according to a strict hierarchy which we will describe here while clearly accepting (see II, 1) that this hierarchy is going to be perverted by the erotic determinations. From top to bottom of the social scale within the fiction we have: a) the European upper middle class (La Bessière: rich enough to 'buy up all Morocco', 'citizen of the world'; dilettante painter — He would be a good painter if he were not so rich'); b) the colonial upper-middle class (the group of La Bessière's friends who, at the cabaret, are shocked by the 'democratic tastes' of La Bessière, who leaves them to go and sit at Caesar's table; guests at the dinner party to celebrate the engagement, including a general in the French Army); c) the native bourgeoisie; d) officers of the Legion (Captain Caesar); e) the owner of the cabaret, who occupies an intermediary position between the two categories (see IV); f) the lower strata, i.e. the (miserably paid) *légionnaires*, the Moroccan crowds, the dancers-singers-prostitutes of the cabaret, and the women of the Legion's 'rear-guard'.

It should be noted that while the masculine characters of the fiction have a fixed social status (not modified by the erotic determinations), the social position of the women is fluid: Mme Caesar seems to have been through the experience of a drop on the social ladder before her marriage replaced her within category d); Amy Jolly, herself fallen — from a relatively elevated rank (at least in terms of wealth, e.g. reference to her mink coat) — to category f, is again to be promoted to the highest position by the circumstance of her coming marriage to La Bessière, and again drops to the lowest to become one of the ‘women without hope’ who follow the soldiers.

3. As for the *erotic determinations*, these set up two homologous triangles: La Bessière — Amy Jolly — Brown; Caesar — Mme Caesar — Brown. The erotic situations inscribed in these two triangles are in their turn over-determined socially; in other words, the set of relations to which the situations of these characters give rise are inscribed into the pattern of *Morocco* and at the same time produce it (the reciprocal interaction indicated above).

It is possible to see a series of homologous relationships:

La Bessière, diffident lover of Amy Jolly/Caesar, the deceived husband; Amy Jolly/Mme Caesar, both equally déclassé by their deviant erotic behaviour which assimilates them with the prostitutes; Amy Jolly, in love with Brown although courted by La Bessière and then engaged to him/Mme Caesar, also in love with Brown, i.e. with a man hierarchically inferior to her husband.

*In other words, in all cases the object of desire is of inferior status to the desiring subject:*

La Bessière, in love with a fallen woman, has perhaps also been the lover of Mme Caesar; Caesar is deceived by a wife for whom there is every ground for supposing that before her marriage she was in the same situation as Amy Jolly; Amy Jolly and Mme Caesar both pursue a déclassé, i.e. Brown. The inscription of these hierarchical erotic relations brings into play:

1) Europeans with social status/declassé Europeans:

La Bessière — Mme Caesar

La Bessière — Amy Jolly

Caesar — Mme Caesar

Mme Caesar — Brown

Amy Jolly — Brown

(Although, like Brown, they belong to the category of the déclassés. Mme Caesar and Amy Jolly have/have had, or could have, access to a higher social rank — a possibility from which Brown seems to be excluded, which ‘downgrades’ him in relation to them.)

2) Europeans/Moroccans:

Legionnaires — Moroccan women

We will simply note a point here, in order to return to it later (cf. IV. 1) — the interaction between 1) and 2). For example the ambiguity of Mme Caesar’s racial type and dress, ‘the character she plays in a sense representing a compromise between the Europeanness incarnated by Amy Jolly (Aryan) and the ‘orientalness’ (Morocco = Other than the West) incarnated in the fiction by the Moroccans whose dress she adopts.

4. Moreover, the play of the double, erotic-social, web is not produced independently of its *topographical* inscription. This inscription is effected along two axes: one vertical, and — within the Town — linking (by establishing a hierarchy) the High (La Bessière’s palace) to the Low (the cabaret), while the cabaret itself is divided into a ‘high’ and a ‘low’ (the pit); the other, horizontal (Town/Desert).

5. a) The movement of desire works from high to low: towards the lower strata (cabaret, prostitutes); b) access to the desert implies a passage through the lower strata: in particular, Amy Jolly only gets there after having first found and then re-found Brown, in the cabaret and then in a seedy café; c) it is therefore in the depths that desiring subjects discover the object of their desire; and in the fiction, the desert is inscribed as the pure signifier of that desire — that is, as a mirage, a snare, always evoked but never shown until the final scene. Thus in Amy Jolly’s room when Brown wishes to provoke her desire he literally ‘lures’ her with an evocation of the desert (he goes to the window and says ‘you can smell the desert this evening’ and then runs his fingers through his hair). The inscription of the Legion and Brown as ‘vanishing’ (see IV. 2) is a correlative of the desert’s function as a snare: cf. the remark by La Bessière about the women camp followers: ‘And very often when they do (catch up with them) they find their men dead.’

6. The fictional matrix we have just established (i.e. social/erotic/topographical determinations) is not specific to this film, nor to Sternberg — even though some of the modes of its inscription are specific (cf. IV). It emerges as the variation and transformation of a structure

whose other occurrences could be distinguished equally well in a) popular novels of the beginning of the century (indeed even in *La Recherche du temps perdu*), b) in numerous films produced between the beginning of the cinema and the thirties (Feuillade, Murnau, Lang, etc.). The transformation lies mainly in the fact that the fictional axis (High/Low — Desirer/Desired) is here reduplicated (High/Low + Town/Desert); the relation Town/Desert emerges as an ideological re-marking of the structure (ideological in the sense that the structuring function of the twofold erotic/sociological determination is almost masked by the fact that the over-inscription of the horizontal Town/Desert axis is reduced to a purely erotic phantasy — i.e. the return to Nature as the locus of desire, as opposed to the town). It ought to be borne in mind that *Morocco* was produced, seen, and continues to be seen, solely as a love film (cf. its French title: *Cœurs brûlés*) and moreover that it to some extent borrows its fictional elements from the melodrama genre. As far as the effects of this transformation are concerned, they emerge within a process of inscription which operates with the aid of constantly reduplicated batteries of signifiers:

Europeans — Moroccans (cf. 2);

Old World — New World: Brown typed as an American, in opposition to La Bessière and Caesar who are men of Old Europe;

Characters with social status/declassé or displaced characters; Even at the visual level: grids and screens (towns)/uniform white expanse (desert).

These effects consist in reduplicated journeys (cabaret — desert; desert — cabaret), in a proliferation of rhymes and inversions (which are implicated in the structural relations here, and are not just a decorative surplus as in the case of other Sternberg films). They also consist in characters who produce a *mediation* between the two axes and the multiple sets of signifiers which overdetermine them. This does not necessarily mean that these characters have the function of 'intermediaries' in *the fiction* (as is the case for La Bessière and the owner of the cabaret, cf. IV, 1), but that they ensure within the logic of the text a mixing of erotic and/or racial determinations (for example, Mme Caesar, cf. 3; the owner of the cabaret 'Lo Tinto', cf. IV, 1).

### III MYTHOLOGICAL DETERMINATIONS

1. In the forefront of the mythological determinations is the historical role of the star in the Hollywood system and its articulation within the Sternbergian fiction. It can be said of any star that the process of fetishistic eroticisation which defines them as such assigns them a relatively restricted number of possible types of fiction in which their

presence then has the function of *opérateur*: the fictional elements of the star-film are to a large extent the re-investment of what a star's preceding films and, equally, extrafilmic life, have inscribed as a *rôle* credited to the particular actor or actress. But instead of confirming the specialisation implied by such repetition, the inscription on the contrary seeks to mask it and to present it as difference, indeed as a 'first time'; from one film to the next, the presence of the star transcends the filmic/extra-filmic opposition, but the films themselves emerge as a constant denial of that transcendence, while at the same time making use of the recognition effects it implies: here, for instance, as in her preceding film *The Blue Angel*, and in her extra-filmic life, Marlene is a cabaret singer.

a) The effects of recognition are therefore produced by her status as cabaret singer with reference to *The Blue Angel*, as well as by the inscription within the fiction of the transformation wrought upon her by Sternberg (multiple allusions to her recent worldly past). The heroine thus enjoys a capital of past history (wealth, erotic success) which she is progressively to squander — the production of these effects of recognition being directly overdetermined by the mythology and the themes set in motion by Sternberg, which are precisely those of 'fall' and squandering.

b) In fictional terms, the operation of denial is inscribed by setting in motion a double principle of variation:

The scene where Marlene appears produces a *narrative and iconographical* break in the sense that: 1) the preceding scene (the Legion's arrival in town, Tom Brown arranging a meeting with a Spanish woman), is interrupted just at the point of follow-up (shot of the raised hands of a dancer holding castanets which is left unexplained); 2) it is succeeded by an empty shot of the port (noise of a siren) which functions like a placard announcing the not very readable scene that follows; 3) iconographically, this scene is produced in paradigmatic opposition to the entire beginning of the film: sun/night, dry/damp, land/sea, dust/smoke; i.e. South/North; 4) it is to be read as flowing from a previous fiction (the arrival of Marlene in Morocco is explicitly presented as the substitute for a suicide, the dénouement of the absent fiction).

While Marlene is, as in *The Blue Angel*, a cabaret singer, the singer status is here socially and erotically overdetermined in an inverse sense to *The Blue Angel*: the cabaret-suicide association implies a defeat which puts Amy Jolly in closer analogy with Professor Unrat than with Lola Lola, and this clearly is bound to have some connection with the Amy Jolly-Brown erotic relation.

This double process of recognition-denial confers on the star a fictional place which is obviously determining for the dramatic level, but one that is played out less as an *activity* than as its *déflement*.

In other words, by her inscription within the fiction, her incarnation as protagonist, her placement in relation with other characters, the star

compromises her identity-in-itself (i.e. her being-as-star) and puts into play her 'value'. The inscription therefore consists in a *deferment* of her signification (her 'value') as star within the production of a *surplus* (her becoming-actress and protagonist); a surplus which is however transferred back to her credit insofar as the fictional effects produced (by her gestures, the course she traces in the film, her relations with the other characters) are in the last analysis constrained to signify her as 'star'.

This is marked by the *austerity of the star's acting* (parsimony of gesture, restricted number of partners, a closing-off — particularly accentuated in Sternberg — of the fictional place, which serves like a display-case); in other words few fictional effects are produced which are not required to valorise her.

Sternberg's films occupy a particular place within the star system because it was Sternberg himself who produced Marlene as star, contrary to the majority of Hollywood film makers (including some of the greatest) who ultimately did no more than ensure the circulation of the value we have just discussed. What does Sternberg himself say about this? 'Don't tell me that Marlene fills my work, that she runs away with it, that she possesses it and drives it . . . Marlene is not Marlene, Marlene is me, and she films, let's get that clear. Marlene is not Marlene, Marlene is me, and she knows that better than anyone.' (*Cahiers*, no. 168.) Such assertions, which seem to denigrate the star system, in fact do no more than reflect its ideology, while at the same time perverting it, inasmuch as the author Sternberg appropriates to himself the value of the star, which he can thenceforward only consider as the devalued surplus of his work. So that if he speaks of her as fetish, it can only be in the mode of a violent denial.

This phantasy representation by Sternberg of his relations with Marlene is inscribed in all the key moments of the fiction of *Morocco*, on the one hand in the character of La Bessière, who is, first of all physically, Sternberg's double. From the start (scene of the arrival of the boat), La Bessière sets himself up as the protector and suitor of Marlene (he gives her his card — i.e. his name). Thereafter, La Bessière is insistently presented as a man who does not want to be taken over by a woman (he has the reputation of being a hardened bachelor); he does nothing to restrain Amy Jolly and even drives her to Brown in his car. In other words, he himself pushes to its limits the process of devaluation of Amy Jolly which was marked from the beginning of the film. On the other hand these same fantasies of devaluation are inscribed in the relation between Amy Jolly and Brown, who first assimilates her with the prostitutes he habitually frequents ('I always pay for what I get'), and considers her on their model as his thing — an assimilation which the end of the film renders effective. And this can be related to the following statement by Sternberg: 'When I finished *The Blue Angel* I had finished with Marlene. I didn't want to make another film with her. But she followed me back onto home territory as most women do, and I had to

direct her in *Morocco*.'

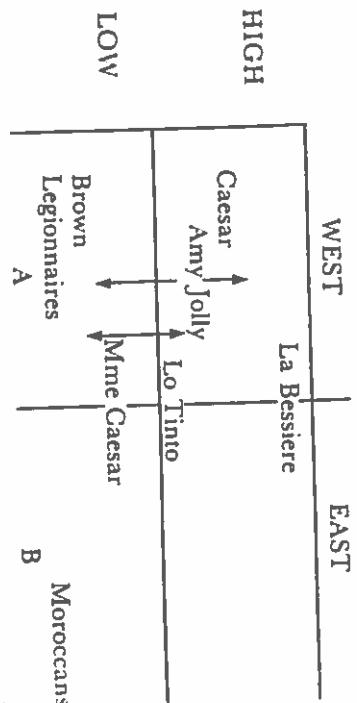
2. Another type of Sternberg phantasy has to be taken into account, which constitutes a masochistic variant on the one just described: the phantasy of abandonment (La Bessière is abandoned by Amy Jolly in the same way that Caesar is deceived by his wife). Both fantasies have a structuring function in the fiction inasmuch as they directly determine the erotic situations, but also inscribe themselves in the breaks in the fiction in an unpredictable and emphatic way:

when Caesar, having vainly attempted to make Brown confess, himself utters his wife's name in front of all the protagonists; in the same way, in front of his guests, La Bessière confesses his absolute submission to the caprices of Amy Jolly ('You see . . . I love her; I'd do anything to make her happy.')

These two scenes, in their term for term correspondence to each other, produce a double transgressive effect: — a transgression of the social codes through public admission of distress, of defeat, of irremediable loss, above all when this is located in the erotic order; and equally, transgression of the Hollywood fictional codes to the extent that these, to meet the dramatic requirements, re-assert those social codes (telling a story means postponing the confession, solution, cause, etc.). Insofar as these fantasies systematically devalue the object of desire and pose that object as unattainable, they are able to have a structuring action in a fictional field where a hierarchy of relations is inscribed that goes as far as their total disjunction.

#### IV INSCRIPTION<sup>5</sup>

1. The inscription of the signifiers of Westernness and Easternness. (This diagram only takes into account the 'characters' implicated in the over-determined social-erotic relations outlined in II, 3.)



In their physical typing, Amy Jolly and Caesar represent the old world of (northern) Europe (they are 'Aryans');

Brown (the name, gestural typing) represents the New World; Easternness is only represented by the Moroccan women (dancers, singers, prostitutes, the 'rear-guard');

Although the Moroccans feature episodically in the fiction (crowds at prayer, rich bourgeoisie, Mme Caesar's hired men beaten up by Brown), they do not enter into the erotic relations which constitute the fictional web;

La Bessière, presented as French, is placed in A for the same reason as Amy Jolly and Caesar; however, physically he is a Latin (Amy Jolly and Caesar are Nordic). Moreover, as a Frenchman *he has a relationship with Morocco* (Amy Jolly and Caesar have run aground there and remain alien to it except, in the case of Amy Jolly, for the last shot). He has a *knowledge* of Morocco (implied in his status as one of the master class, the correlative of a blindness — his knowledge is exclusively concerned with the 'horizontal axis', cf. II, 6 — he knows what the 'rear-guard' is, but is ignorant of the 'crimes of the lower orders'); Finally, two characters who are intermediary between A and B: Mme Caesar (cf. II, 4), and the owner of the cabaret, Lo Tinto — a Levantine, strongly typed in dress and physique (ridiculous evening dress, ring in his ear).

a) It is worth recalling that on the level of social determinations, the three characters who represent the Old World have, or have had, an elevated social position. While Brown, who represents the New World, occupies the lowest position on the scale of representatives of Westernness (without there ever being any allusion made to his drop on the social scale).

On the other hand, the Moroccans occupy the lowest position on the scale of representatives of Easternness.

b) On the level of erotic determinations, in conformity with a Western mythological tradition, an exclusively feminine value is assigned to the East.

The relationship of femininity to virility undergoes an inversion with reference to the phallocentric phantasy of bourgeois society (an inversion whose relative frequency in bourgeois *fictions* is moreover notable) by virtue of the fact that Brown (cf. a) occupies a very much inferior social position and is the object of desire of Amy Jolly; note that Lo Tinto's mixed race, like La Bessière's morphotype, are correlates of their signs of inversion (the preciosity of La Bessière's behaviour and gestures, Lo Tinto's portly physique and his mother-cum-brothel-keeper behaviour vis à vis Amy Jolly); their inscription into the fictional situation makes the three characters representing the Old World into signifiers of castration: La Bessière and

Caesar inasmuch as they lose their women, Marlene as fetish (note 2, below; that the impossibility of a return to Europe for Brown is linked to the fact that civil dress *would signify* his castration); the dynamics of the fiction put the women into circulation from West to East and from the Old World to the New: it is the American who has all the women, who themselves rejoin the Orient as their mythic locus.

2. As we have seen (cf. 1) the critique of the fetishism of value, in an 'artistic' discourse produced within the capitalist system (and indeed in a location — Hollywood — where fetishism is subject to a displacement, from commodity onto characters, which generalises the circulation of exchange value onto bodies and individuals), is carried out only in the mode of an erotic fiction itself entirely determined by the ideology. But the — of course intra-ideological — critical effect is readable today only because it was *wrought* within a fiction which is simultaneously *erotic and social*. (Whereas a solely erotic determination would never have been able to produce anything except an effect of specular duplication.)

a) All values in *Morocco* are fetishes: money, jewels, clothes, woman (star). However, it is not just the Sternbergian inscription which produces them as fetishes; they flow directly from fields (social, cultural, psychological — external and anterior to the film) in which they are already constituted as fetishes. Moreover, the reactivation of their fetishist nature by the Sternbergian fiction does not exhaust their value within that inscription — rather it preserves and accentuates it. The Sternbergian fetish, therefore, does not inscribe itself into the fiction *solely* as a signifier of castration<sup>6</sup> — it is not solely involved in the trajectories of the erotic (as their cause). Note inversely, how in Lang the inscription is strictly localised at the intersection of all the erotic and topographical trajectories (cf. the diamond in *Moonfleet*, the android of *Metropolis*, etc.).

It follows therefore that in Sternberg, and in *Morocco*, the fetish object or character is not inscribed according to a social/erotic topography as rigorous as that of Lang, even though it is always in the locations of desire (the cabaret and the desert, cf. II, 4) that the fetish functions as the cause of that desire; this is because it also gives rise to inscription effects which are not implied by the narrative logic. (In later films, like *Blonde Venus* or *The Devil is a Woman*, these effects, now purely plastic, managed through a proliferation of veils, feathers, baubles, etc., to parasitise the narrative itself, and in extreme cases, to devour it.)

For example, it will be noted how Amy Jolly denies the jewels offered her by La Bessière their erotic value, so that from there on they denote only Amy Jolly's accession to the bourgeoisie.

b) Thus in *Morocco*, the fetishes literally function simultaneously as both bourgeois value and erotic signifiers; they are therefore inscribed both as inalienable values, not capable of being squandered, and as

'ignifiers of that squandering.

In Sternberg's films and therefore in *Morocco*, the fetish nature (of the object and the character) is exclusively concerned with what relates to Marlene, her body, her clothes, her make-up, her sophistication, her adornment. For *Morocco* in particular, note:

1) that the power of seduction and fascination that Marlene exerts (first cabaret scene, where she is literally presented as elusive and untouchable by anyone other than Brown), and the fetishisation which it entails are in proportion to her *inaccessibility*. Freud in his 'On Narcissism'<sup>1</sup> has described 'such women' who 'have the greatest fascination for men, not only for aesthetic reasons, since as a rule they are the most beautiful, but because of certain interesting psychological constellations'. This (inseparable) seduction and refusal are the correlatives of the constitution of a *system of signs*, of marks which are closed, artificial, coherent and self-sufficient;

2) note too that this system of signs has to be broken down (i.e. it has to lose its closed nature, its perfection) for the desire aroused by Marlene to cease to come within the order of fetishism and this time to inscribe her into the metonymic signifying chain of desire. Quite clearly, for the reasons cited at the beginning of this paragraph, this 'criticism' of fetishism can only be carried out in the last analysis — and this in spite of all mirages, masks, etc. — from a standpoint which is itself fetishist, which does not absolve us from having to describe its mechanism.

Each time therefore that Sternberg wishes to show us Amy Jolly in a non-fetishist erotic situation (the non-fetishism is illusory, as we have just seen), she begins to be 'squandered'; she offers Brown an apple, she gives him her key, she breaks her pearl necklace, she throws off her shoes. The fetishist nature of this 'critique' of fetishism is marked in the fact that

Amy Jolly's rejection of her accessories immediately makes them rise retroactively to become fetish-objects in their turn. What results from all this? The impossibility for Sternberg to inscribe into his fiction the idealist statement which seems to be implied by his critique of fetishism' (i.e. return to nature, renunciation on the part of the woman of her accessories, her middle class social status — all that was in the air in the heyday of attempts to capture Sternberg for surrealism, cf. Ado Kyrou). An impossibility which rises from the fact that the moralising inscription of the renunciation of her accessories (necklace, shoes) is overdetermined by the inevitable inscription of these same accessories as fetish-objects which renew the chain of desire.

It must be noted here that this closed economy in which the formal fetishism and the anti-fetishist ideology constantly refer back to each other is translated by a fetishisation of the film locus (conceived as a precious 'little box', a jewel case, etc.) and plastic effects (play of light, masks, veils, etc.) which in the last analysis constitute the *image itself* as mask, gauze, screen — a total effect in which one can distinguish

everything that has determined the fetishist appeal of Sternberg's films and to which, either in order to reject it as a 'fancywork' aesthetic, or to valorise it as style, critics have reduced the Sternbergian writing.

The vicious circle of a reciprocal critique of the ideology of 'natural purity' by fetishism and of fetishism by that ideology, thus emerges as strictly interminable within the framework of the bourgeois capitalist system into which Sternberg fits. (From which one can see how great a misunderstanding prevented Hollywood from recognising Sternberg as one of its own, the myth of the *artiste maudit*, accrediting him with a fringe position which is no more than a false front). It is this very impasse which nourishes the fiction of *Morocco*, and most especially, the relations of Amy Jolly and Brown which can only be resolved in a flight-pursuit between the two characters: one (Amy Jolly) never able to produce himself other than as fetish, the other (Brown) never able to produce himself other than as mirage. (The elusive nature of the latter is underscored by two written inscriptions — the first 'I changed my mind', trace of his disappearance; the second, Amy Jolly's name engraved on the table in the café, both a trace of his passing through and a signal for the resumption of her pursuit which is by definition endless); as an ideological figure, he has no place in the fetishist field of Amy Jolly, and can only signify by his absence or his flight the impossible elsewhere — the Desert of pleasure [*jouissance*] and of death — where the fetishism of the woman would no longer be valid currency. Hence no doubt the accent this film brings to bear on the demand for love; that is, on an erotic relationship without a price, but for which Dr Lacan has taught us that the love offered is nothing other than the gift of what one does not have.

(translated by Diana Matias)

#### Notes

1. This use of the term *énoncé* derives from a distinction made by the French linguist Emile Benveniste, between *énonciation* ('enunciation') and *énoncé*. *Enunciation* is the act whereby an utterance is produced, and *énoncé* means what is thereby uttered in itself. (trans.)

2. Although for want of an adequate English term this has been rendered as 'the One', Kristeva's opposition is not between *l'Un et l'Ailleur* but between *le Même et l'Autre*, because she is applying her concepts to the text rather than to the individual. For an amplification of her use of this term see Kristeva's *Le Tréc du roman* (The Hague; Mouton, 1970), p. 60. (trans.)

3. On the notion of masquerade we refer to Joan Rivière, 'La féminité en tant que mascarade' (*La Psychanalyse*, no. 7) translated as 'Womanliness as a masquerade' in *Psychanalyse and Female Sexuality*, edited with an introduction by Dr Hendrik M. Ruitenberg (Newhaven, Conn.; College and University Press Services, 1966) and to Michèle Montclay, 'Recherches sur la Féminité' (*Critique*, no. 278): 'Within this piling up of dotty objects, feathers, hats, strange baroque constructions which rise like so many silent insignia, a dimension of femininity takes shape which Lacan, taking up Joan Rivière's term designates as *masquerade*. But it must be seen that the end of such a masquerade is to say nothing. *Absolutely nothing*. And in order to produce this nothing a woman uses her own body to disguise herself.'

4. The authors are here using 'operator' in its mathematical sense, defined as 'a symbol indicating an operation'; an 'operation' in mathematics being the subjection of a number to a process affecting its value, e.g. multiplication. (trans.)

5. In French, *l'écriture*—literally 'writing', but this is too general to give the sense of the process whereby meaning is inscribed into the text. (trans.)

6. See Freud's text 'P籸ishism', *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-73), Vol. 21, and Lacan, 'La Signification du Phallus', in *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966).

7. Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 14, 1966.

Louis Audibert

## The Flash of the Look

(originally published in *Cinématographe*, No. 25 (March 1977), pp. 7-12)

### A SINGULAR PRIVILEGE

There is a paradox concerning the close-up in classic film theory. It is one that is true of pure theoreticians whether or not they themselves are filmmakers (Eisenstein, Epstein, Eichenbaum, Balazs), and also of historians who explicitly or not have always been motivated by a certain normative intention (Bazin, Mitry). Indeed all these names can be cited, despite differences or real divergences, as indices of a common project constituted by a double movement: — a fixation toward the origin, or origins, that speaks of a search for the initial moment (even if it is sometimes multiple) of the crystallization or conquest of the cinema's essence in a decisive and absolute passage from a technological prehistory; — similarly, this essence has always been seen as that of a language, inevitably leading to the supposition of a *language-system*, defined either very strictly (cf. among others the cine-stylistic of Tynyanov and Eichenbaum), or as an ensemble of codes delimiting a certain number of possible figures.

Within this project, mention of the close-up is precisely that of a privileged figure which in an exemplary way accomplishes the *leap*, the passage, giving access to the essence and the truth of the cinema. Because of it, and thanks to it, the semantic capacity of filmic discourse is organised. Tynyanov writes, 'Close-ups are, so to speak, the subject and the predicate of the cine-sentence.' Eisenstein recalls and emphasizes the artistic change brought about by Griffith in making the first narrative insertions of the close-up. On this point, Jean Mitry, after so many others, will only follow Eisenstein.

Nevertheless, classic theory — this is one of its characteristic points — has then been led to curtail, reduce, repress this privilege of a unit, however important it has been to the advent of the cinema. This repression works in several ways: the historian who empirically notes its relative scarcity — a paradox — naturally concludes the impossibility, even the absurdity, of a continuous series of close-ups, or of the frequent